

Senior Safety

Last Updated Friday, 28 April 2006

Senior citizens represent the most rapidly growing segment of the population in the United States. Although national surveys indicate that senior citizens are the least victimized age group, they often exhibit the greatest fear of crime. This fear can at least partially be contributed to their fear of personal vulnerability. Like other age groups, seniors can empower themselves and reduce opportunities for criminals to strike by being alert and careful. Seniors are more vulnerable to crimes like purse snatching, mugging, and fraud. Here are some basic safety tips:

When you are at home...

- Keep your doors locked at all times, even when you're in the house. Use deadbolt locks on exterior doors and install a through-the-door viewer on all exterior doors.
 - If you live alone, don't advertise it. Use only your first initial in phone books, directories, and apartment lobbies.
 - Get to know your neighbors and keep their phone numbers in case of emergency.
 - Work out a "buddy" system with a friend to check on each other daily. Many communities have programs where police call every day to check if residents need assistance.
 - If you arrive home and suspect a stranger is inside, do not go inside. Leave quietly and call the police-your safety should always come first.
 - Don't open the door unless you know your visitor.
 - If the person is a salesman or representative, verify their information with the business before opening the door. Refuse to deal with anyone who will not provide this information before opening the door.
 - Someone may knock at the door and ask to use your telephone for an emergency. Never open the door. Take the information and make the call for them.
- Protect Your Money...
- If you receive checks in the mail regularly, arrange instead for them to be deposited directly in your bank account. The Social Security Administration and most pension funds offer this service.
 - Don't carry a purse if you can avoid it. If you must, hold it close to your body-don't let it dangle. Never carry a wallet in your back pocket. Put it in an inside jacket pocket or front pocket instead.
 - Avoid carrying large sums of money. If you must, have a friend accompany you.
 - Don't sign a check or contract until you are sure you know the details and it is for a legitimate reason. Don't be afraid to delay a signing or to say 'no!'
 - Don't keep large sums of money in your home.
 - Legitimate sweepstakes or prize offers don't ask for payment because it is illegal. If you are asked for payment in order to receive a prize, it is probably a scam.
- Don't be conned...

-
If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is! Watch for these schemes:

-
The Pigeon Drop - The swindlers claim they have found a large sum of money and offer to share it with you, but ask you to put up some "good faith" money before you get in on the deal. Your money disappears and you are left with nothing but phony instructions on how to collect your share of the "found" cash.

-
The Bank Examiner - A professional-looking person tells you he is a bank official and needs your help in the investigation of a dishonest teller. He asks you to withdraw cash from your savings account and give the money to him so he can check the serial numbers. Your money disappears, as does the con artist.

-
Home Repairs - Never accept an unsolicited "free" inspection of your furnace, roof, air conditioner, or anything else in your home. Never leave inspectors alone when they are in your home. Don't give them an opportunity to tamper with your home or appliances.

-
Buying at the Door - Watch for gimmicks or so-called "free" gift offers. When sales people call, wait, don't buy today. If it's legitimate, they'll come back tomorrow. In the meantime, check out the company with your local Consumer Affairs Office or Better Business Bureau.

-
Remember that con artists can be men or women.
If you are a victim...

-
Don't attempt to resist. You might get injured. Sit down, even on the sidewalk, so you won't get knocked down. Scream and make noise.

-
Never pursue a criminal. Call the police immediately.

-
If you have been swindled or suspect fraud, contact your local police department.

-
Make an effort to get an accurate description of a criminal-remember things such as age, race, complexion, body build, clothing, height and weight, hair, eyes, or unusual features.

-
If you are the victim of fraud, call the police immediately. You may be embarrassed because you were tricked, but your information is vital in catching the con artist and preventing others from being victimized.